



Joint Statement from Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, Bishop of Arlington, and Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout, Bishop of Richmond, on July 9th Virginia General Assembly Special Session

On May 31, we along with the faithful of both of our dioceses mourned the loss of life that was so tragically taken in the shootings that occurred at the Virginia Beach Municipal Center. We continue to keep in prayer: Laquita Brown, Tara Gallagher, Mary Louise Gayle, Alexander Gusev, Katherine Nixon, Richard Nettleton, Christopher Rapp, Ryan Cox, Joshua Hardy, Michelle “Missy” Langer, Robert “Bobby” Williams and Herbert “Bert” Snelling. We also continue to pray for their families, those injured, their co-workers and those who provide assistance within the community.

Through prayer, we must also discern what can be done to make our communities safer and address the root causes of violence and terror. Respect and reverence for human life – all life, at every stage of development and in all circumstances – require us to protect it. The culture of violence pervading our society must be challenged by the Church and people of good will. We must be people who reflect on the Word of Life and then act upon it.

Our commitment to respect all human life and to promote peace in our communities through our words and actions has consistently led us, through the Virginia Catholic Conference, to be advocates for reasonable safety regulations for firearms and proper screening for those seeking to acquire a firearm. In a statement issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2017, USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development Chairman Bishop Frank J. Dewane stated, “While acknowledging the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and related jurisprudence, we live in a fallen world with daily advances in modern technology. Some weapons are increasingly capable of easily causing mass murder when used with an evil purpose. Society must recognize that the common good requires reasonable steps to limit access to such firearms by those who would intend to use them in that way.”

We recognize that many factors contribute to the violence in our society, which will not be solved by a single piece of legislation. We recognize that firearms often serve the legitimate purpose of self-defense and the defense of loved ones. We also recognize that mental health has been a factor in past shootings and more resources should be invested in early intervention for those at risk of committing a violent act due to mental illness. Therefore, it is our hope that our elected officials will engage in genuine discussions about comprehensive legislation that will help save lives and make our communities safer.

We will continue to be advocates for proposals that promote a comprehensive approach to combatting increasing occurrences of violence, keeping respect for all life at the forefront and ensuring the fundamental liberties of all Americans are protected. We urge our state leaders to engage in civil and meaningful dialogue, seeking to combat all violence in our communities, most especially during the Virginia General Assembly’s Special Session beginning today. Finally, we continue to pray for our elected leaders as they explore sound public policy options for the care and good of all.